

Minister of Health



CANADA

Ministre de la Santé

The Honourable L'honorable
Mary Collins

7 IX 1993

Mr. Chris Brown
Ottawa Branch President
Allergy and Environmental
Health Association
c/o General Delivery
Moose Factory, Ontario
P0L 1W0

Dear Mr. Brown:

The Honourable Paul Dick, Minister of Government Services, was kind enough to forward to me a copy of your letter of June 28, 1993, with enclosure, concerning environmental sensitivities.

I appreciate your concern about the abuse of persons with psychiatric problems caused by environmental sensitivities, and I understand that psychiatric problems create suffering for many.

However, as you are aware from previous correspondence with my Department, there is considerable debate about the origins and health effects of environmental sensitivities. Some people believe that symptoms commonly associated with psychiatric disorders are really symptomatic of environmental sensitivities. Others question the validity of associating symptoms with an environmental cause.

No reliable data exist on the prevalence of this illness, and there are no established reliable diagnostic criteria. Despite this, the diagnostic label of environmental sensitivities is being applied. Some have stated that the chronic nature of the complaints in these patients, associated with symptoms of central nervous system dysfunction such as depression, anxiety, irritability and difficulty concentrating, could lead to

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Ottawa, Canada K1A 0K9

a psychiatric diagnosis such as major depression. There is a lack of consensus amongst the medical profession regarding this diagnosis or the progression of the illness.

As you are aware, the Department's Laboratory Centre for Disease Control held a workshop in May 1990. Participants included medical experts, health researchers and representatives of voluntary service organizations. The workshop proceedings were published in "Chronic Diseases in Canada" (1991). One outstanding issue mentioned was the "psychosocial" aspect of multiple chemical sensitivities (MCS), which may be quite prominent in some individuals.

To pursue issues identified at that workshop, a second workshop was held in December 1992. It was cosponsored by the Mental Health Division, Health Services Directorate, in the Health Programs and Services Branch, and the Laboratory Centre for Disease Control, Health Protection Branch, of my Department.

North American scientists and physicians, key national organizations, and many representatives from the Allergy and Environmental Health Association (AEHA) were invited to the meeting. Proceedings from this meeting are being prepared and published. I have asked my officials to include your name on the distribution list for the document.

I appreciate having your concerns brought to my attention.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Mary Collins', written in dark ink.

Mary Collins

c.c.: The Honourable Paul Dick, P.C., Q.C., M.P.